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3 February 1970

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: New NRO SLR Program (NRO Project Number 10046)
Meeting of 20 January 1970

1. On 20 January 1970, a meeting was held by NRO in its offices for the purpose of discussing plans for the testing of an improved SLR sensor for possible ultimate use in aircraft or satellites. The specific objective of the meeting was to discuss proposals for test areas that would be most suited to demonstrate SLR capabilities against actual intelligence targets which would meet the needs for operational coverage under conditions which obviate the use of photography--cloud cover, poor weather, night, etc. The program is under the direction

[Redacted]

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2. No specific objectives for the program have been determined by NRO.

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[Redacted] Such usefulness probably lies in the ability of SLR to obtain imagery for purposes of change detection and levels of activity at times when photography cannot be used. [Redacted] mentioned the following as some of the applications:

Sea surveillance.
Arms control and disarmament.
Mapping.
Crisis management.
Post-strike assessment.
Warning/indications of hostility.

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3. NRO is desirous of conducting an objective test of the SLR by using it under the most typical conditions of targets and terrain that can be found. The mid-east desert would provide the best of conditions for SLR, while the Laos jungles would provide the poorest conditions. These would be ruled out. In attempting to determine the best area for test coverage, NRO had evidently asked for recommendations from DIA and RADC, as well as NPIC. It was apparent at the outset of the meeting that DIA and RADC had considered North Korea, Southeast Asia, Cuba, the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and the South China coast. North Korea was favored because it consists of areas difficult to cover, and because of the presence of ground forces targets. They were thinking in terms of tactical use rather than strategic use. However, other factors mitigate against N. Korea and other areas; politically, over-flights or close-in peripheral flights are problematical, etc. North Korean flights cannot be made closer than 50 miles from the periphery except at the DMZ. In addition, providing a support base for the aircraft presents problems.

4. In preparation for determining an NPIC test area nomination, [redacted] obtained recommendations from the IEG Divisions based upon the considerations of the presence of typical targets, variety of targets, accessibility, existence of a good collateral data base, variations in terrain, strategic intelligence requirements, etc. The unanimous response was the nomination of Cuba. As a result, IEG prepared the case for the recommendation of Cuba, and [redacted] presented the case before the NRO meeting using a map which illustrated suggested aircraft flight paths and desired imagery coverage. Lists of targets recommended for coverage were presented to further support the recommendation. The group was told that IEG selected Cuba over other areas that were considered for the following reasons.

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- a. A large number and variety of targets, typical of strategic intelligence requirements, which are accessible to SLR coverage.
- b. The existence of an excellent data base of collateral information and photographic coverage which is necessary to imagery evaluation.
- c. An opportunity to test SLR for change detection by obtaining coverage at night and during periods of cloud coverage. It is indicated that many targets

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c. (Cont.)
increase in activity or undergo change during these periods, but levels of activity and change have not been observed through photographic coverage. An excellent case in point was an IRIS II mission, received that morning, which attempted to confirm a report that a Soviet ship was delivering surface-to-surface missiles to Cuba. It was found that the ship had already been in the harbor and put out to sea at the time of the IRIS mission. The ship could have been off-loaded under the cover of darkness or weather. SLR could have identified the ship at dockside and might have been capable of detecting missiles. It would have been a good test for SLR capabilities.

d. The terrain of Cuba is variable and quite typical--neither ideal nor too difficult.

e. Bases for the aircraft and support facilities are readily available.

f. Concurrent or supporting photo coverage could be obtained.

5. The presentation by [redacted] was excellent, objective, and convincing. The only objection of any substance that was raised was a concern over the increase in intensity of recon flights in the area which would be created by the NRO-suggested test plan of a flight a day or every two days for a month. However, it was pointed out that the test may only require 5 or 6 flights which could be spread over a long period, or might be substituted for scheduled photo flights.

6. After considerable discussion, it was apparent that the group preferred Cuba as the test area over other candidates. Col. [redacted] briefly summarized the conclusions on area considerations as follows:

a. Cuba - the best choice because of low risk, lowest cost, high intelligence interest, availability of bases, and good targets.

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- b. Southeast Asia - high intelligence interest, operations bases available, some good targets, higher risk than Cuba, and poor terrain (heavy vegetation).
- c. South China Coast - high interest, lack of a good data base, available bases, and serious political problems.
- d. North Korea and DMZ - 50 mile coastal zone limits proximity to targets except for DMZ, costly operational support, few good targets (most tactical), and terrain masking.

7. [redacted] advised the group that in 1967 a similar request for SLR coverage of Cuba was made by NPIC for the testing of the AN/APQ-108. The request was approved by COMOR and the Air Force, but died at the upper levels. [redacted] copies of the correspondence and COMOR minutes substantiating the matter.

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8. Two days subsequent to the meeting, [redacted] requested that NPIC submit a memorandum to NRO outlining the presentation given with reasons for recommending Cuba. He also asked that we list the other areas considered by NPIC with reasons for not recommending them. The memorandum is to be attached to an initial plan being prepared by

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[redacted] and to be submitted to [redacted] will prepare and coordinate the memorandum which will be forwarded to NRO through the Executive Director, NPIC.

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[redacted]
 Deputy Chief, Reconnaissance Systems Branch,
 RED/TSSG/NPIC

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